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## **Planners push high-density housing plans**

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DIAMOND BAR - Housing the 23 million people Southern California is expected to have by 2030 will take a concerted effort by local planners, developers and community leaders, housing experts say.

Every day, headlines shout about housing shortages, skyrocketing prices and long commutes from housing-rich areas like the Antelope Valley, while developers are pressured by some civic leaders to build tax-laden retail outlets rather than units that will ease the housing crunch.

At a regional housing summit organized by the Southern California Association of Governments, developers and long-range planners urged community leaders to allow more high-density and affordable housing. About 180 regional leaders attended the summit Friday at the headquarters of the South Coast Air Quality Management District in Diamond Bar.

"From an economic perspective, there's too much demand chasing too little supply - there are some structural changes we need to make to overcome that," said Mark Stivers, a chief consultant to the state Senate's housing committee. "We need to promote up-front planning - here's what we want, here's where we want it. ... So when the right project comes through, get out of the way."

More than 2 million homes are needed by 2030 to accommodate the expected population growth, and current home building rates won't come near reaching that figure. Much of the day's discussion revolved around urban infill - the use of higher-density housing in land-poor areas - and mixed-use developments, such as fancy loft apartments above smart-looking offices or shops. Such projects can revitalize depressed downtowns, outdated strip malls and emptying retail centers.

Developing jobs in housing-heavy areas also is key for the Antelope Valley and the Inland Empire, which send thousands of commuters each day to jobs in Los Angeles and Orange County, respectively.

A recent SCAG report predicted that the Valley's population will grow to 1.2 million residents by 2030, while employment will grow to 263,000 jobs - the worst imbalance in the six-county region.

A panelist Friday praised a partnership between Orange County and Riverside County designed to address that region's jobs-housing imbalance, which clogs freeways into Orange County in the morning and home to Riverside in the evenings.

Governments and developers are building mixed-use and high-density housing in Orange County's city centers, with Brea and Fullerton as models.

These smaller attached and single-family homes are needed by students, seniors, young professional and empty-nesters, said Rick Bishop, the executive director of the Western Riverside Council of Governments.

But where will the low-income service providers live, in a Southland housing market that less than one-third of residents can buy into?

Changing public perception of low-income housing is one of the challenges faced by John Seymor III, a planning director with the not-for-profit Southern California Housing Development Corp.

Well-designed and well-run affordable housing "looks better, in many cases, than the market-rate housing, it's run better, and the residents take care of their community and volunteer," Seymor said. "I'll tell the detractors, get out of your office and come tour the projects. The proof is in the pudding."

Even when city and county decision-makers theoretically agree with constructing low-income housing, or even simply higher-density housing, they often hit a brick wall when their constituents actively protest.

"If 1% of homebuyers drive the home buying market, than 1/10th of 1% of homeowners drive the planning process," said developer Mark Buckland, president of the Olson Co. "That one person (complaining) can generally reduce density by 10%. We're so politically susceptible to that one or two persons coming out and ... saying 'gridlock.' "

Seymor said his group only builds in communities with supportive civic leaders; in some cities they are working on their third housing development.

"What's the way to get the support of cities?" asked Neal Richman, assistant director of UCLA's Advanced Policy Institute. "Remove the nuisance properties - there's tremendous, tremendous value (for cities and for developers) when working with redevelopment."

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